

TWIN CITY LINES

Spring 2017





Inside front cover: Nicollet was still unpaved in 1914, looking south from 37th Street. This blowup shows a streetcar a half mile away at 42nd Street, with the steep hill to 51st Street in the far distance.

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Corrections & new info

In the last issue I couldn't remember who had submitted the story on TCRT streetcar collisions with fire trucks. It was Dave French. Thanks, Dave.

The story about the straphanger ordinance ended inconclusively. Was it ever repealed? The answer appears to be Yes. In 1919 the City of Minneapolis passed a comprehensive new streetcar ordinance, and the straphanger ordinance language is nowhere to be found in it.

The Nicollet Avenue line

-Aaron Isaacs

Nicollet Avenue runs straight south from downtown Minneapolis. It divides the south side of the city into east and west addresses. It also hosted streetcars from 1879 to 1954 and saw the system's last track extension in 1947.

First, the Motor Line

The Nicollet line started as the narrow gauge, steam-powered Minneapolis Lyndale & Lake Calhoun Railway, better known as the Motor Line. It built from downtown to Lake Calhoun in 1879. Because its story will be a big article in a future issue, we'll give you the short version here.

The Motor Line started downtown at Bridge Square, where Hennepin and Nicollet Avenues converged at 1st Street, a block from the Mississippi.

Front cover: A northbound Nicollet car on Marquette Avenue passes 10th Street. The Foshay Tower was still the tallest building in downtown. Norton & Peel photo.
Above: A Washburn Park car lays over at the 50th and Nicollet wye.

This put it within a block of City Hall and the original Union Depot. It traveled a block east to 1st Avenue S. (now called Marquette Avenue).

It ran through downtown on 1st Avenue S., turned right at 13th Street and jogged over a block to Nicollet, then out Nicollet to 31st Street. At 31st the original line to Lake Calhoun turned west.

Expansion further out Nicollet happened in 1884. Track was extended to 37th Street, then east to about Hiawatha Avenue, then southeast to Minnehaha Park. 1884 also saw the opening of the roundhouse at 31st and Nicollet.

The Motor Line's final push out Nicollet came in 1887 with the extension to the newly opened Washburn Home orphanage at 50th Street. By then the company was controlled by the Minneapolis Street Railway.

Electrification and conversion from narrow gauge track to standard gauge happened in 1890. On the south end of downtown, Grant Street was used instead of 13th Street to transition from

Marquette to Nicollet.

The Motor Line branches off Nicollet were soon eliminated. The 1891 opening of the new Lake Harriet electric line on Hennepin Avenue relegated the track on 31st Street from Nicollet to Hennepin to non-revenue status, used only to move deadheading cars to and from the former roundhouse and the new 31st Street Station. It was removed in 1905 when the parallel Lake Street line opened.

A new electric line to Minnehaha Falls via Minnehaha Avenue opened in 1891, causing the abandonment of the line across 37th Street. Those abandonments left a line straight out Nicollet to 50th Street.

The Washburn Park line

The neighborhood along Nicollet south of 50th Street, now known as Tangletown, was referred to as Washburn Park in those days. The Washburn Home orphanage occupied the northwest corner of 50th and Nicollet, where Ramsey Middle School now stands.



Washburn Park was platted but development didn't get going until 1910, when the land was sold to Thorpe Brothers. The neighborhood filled in by 1930, and Washburn High School opened in 1928.

The Nicollet line was originally built as single track with a single passing siding at 24th Street. Sources differ on when the second track was added north of 37th Street, but it was in the period 1884-1886. The second track was added from 37th to 40th Street in 1898, to 42nd Street in 1901, to 46th Street in 1903, and to 50th Street in 1906.

Short line wyes were built to turn the streetcars at 48th Street and 38th Street. Cars could also turn at 31st Street Shops. When the Lake Street line opened in 1905, that also created a wye at Lake and Nicollet.

Meeting the Dan Patch Line

The Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester & Dubuque Electric Traction Company was incorporated in 1906 with the goal of building an interurban electric railway between the cities in its title. It was the brainchild of Marion Savage, who branded it the Dan Patch Line after his beloved champion race horse.

Track construction began in 1908. This was the height of the national interurban craze that resulted in some 16,000 miles being built by 1920. Interurbans were a short-lived bridge technology between conventional steam trains and the automobile/bus era. They offered more frequent service than the steam trains at a lower fare, they stopped in many more places, and they were free of the smoke, soot and cinders of steam propulsion.

Most built their own tracks to the outskirts of large cities, then used the tracks of the local streetcar system to

reach downtown. That's what the St. Paul Southern and the Minneapolis, Anoka & Cuyuna Range did. The Dan Patch intended to do the same via the Nicollet Avenue line.

To that end it built north through Bloomington and Richfield on the alignment of Pleasant Avenue. At 60th Street it turned east for four blocks to Nicollet, then built north in the street right of way to 50th Street, terminus of the streetcar line.

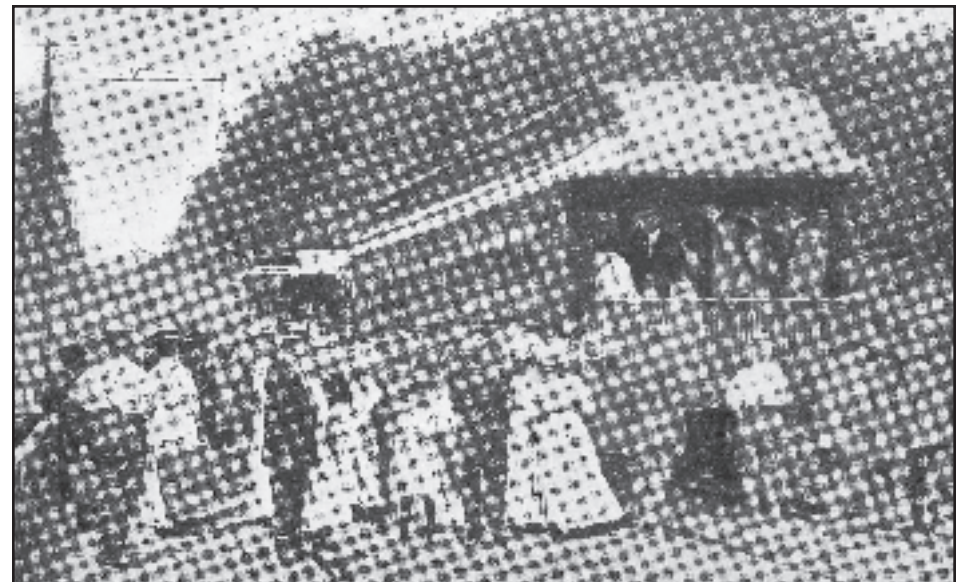
Thanks to the research of Russ Olson, along with John Luecke and Paul Spyhalski in their book on the Minneapolis Northfield & Southern, we now know that the extension to 50th Street was fraught with controversy and why it ultimately didn't work.

To quote from the book, before the Dan Patch started work *"the Minneapolis City Attorney was asked to determine if TCRT could legally extend the tracks of its Washburn Park line on Nicollet Avenue to the city limits (54th Street) to connect with the Dan Patch. The residents of Washburn Park were not at all enthused by the prospect of the Dan Patch having a junction at 50th Street. Nearly 100 of them appeared before the railroad committee of the Minneapolis City Council stating that...service...should be provided by TCRT and not the Dan Patch. Undeterred, the Dan Patch began tearing up Nicollet Avenue between 50th and 54th Streets without securing permission...from any official body."*

According to newspaper accounts, TCRT had at least verbally agreed to host Dan Patch interurbans into downtown. However, street railroads needed a franchise to operate within the city limits and the Dan Patch didn't have one. Residents demanded that TCRT run from 50th to 54th, because they would see a car every 20 minutes, rather than six times a day. On June 9, 1910, the City Council approved the



Two views of Dan Patch Line Strang motorcars at the north end of the Minnehaha Creek bridge in 1910. The streetcar connection at 50th Street was two blocks away over the hill. Minnesota Historical Society photo. The bottom photo appears to show a car that has just arrived, is unloading, and has passengers waiting to board. Could it be that the smaller car behind it shuttled the people over the hill?





Left: At the top of the hill to this day is the house of architect Harry Wild Jones, who designed the Lake Harriet chalet station. This is about 1912, the line from 50th to 54th Street was still single track.

Below: The joint depot at 54th Street.

TCRT extension.

It didn't happen for awhile. On July 4, 1910, the first Dan Patch train left 50th Street and traveled as far as Lakeville. Tracks were extended to Northfield and service was started December 1, 1910.

A ticket office was built at 50th Street. Initial ridership was heavy, requiring the gas-electric cars to pull trailers to accommodate the loads. North of the creek, Nicollet climbed a grade estimated at up to 6 percent to

51st Street, then dropped down a 4 percent grade to 50th Street. While such grades are no problem for electric streetcars, they are considered extreme and even dangerous for conventional railroad trains. In fact, the Dan Patch gas cars couldn't reliably climb the hill, especially pulling trailers. Because of that, they terminated at the north end of the Minnehaha Creek bridge, requiring transfer passengers to walk two blocks, although the photo on the previous page may show a shuttle car making the connection.

TCRT told the city they would extend service to 54th, but only if the summit of the hill was lowered by 12 feet to reduce the grade. Local residents protested the grade change and it never happened.

In August 1910 the Dan Patch made a new proposal to run on the Nicollet line, not to downtown but as far as 32nd Street, where it would build a terminal and a car barn next to TCRT's 31st Street Station. Meanwhile, TCRT had agreed to purchase the track from 50th to 54th Street. However, TCRT told the city it would not share tracks with the Dan Patch, and would not extend service to 54th Street until the railroad pulled back to that location.

There were practical reasons why TCRT opposed giving trackage rights to the Dan Patch. The line never electrified. Instead, it became the first railroad to run completely with internal combustion railcars and locomotives. The gas railcars had much less nimble operating characteristics and would not have mixed well with streetcars. And it was clear they couldn't handle the hills at 51st Street. They also couldn't handle the sharp radius corner at Grant and Nicollet.

On March 11, 1911, TCRT began running to 54th Street (now Diamond Lake Road) and the Dan Patch stopped





Above: The iron bridge over Minnehaha Creek was replaced by the current concrete arch bridge in 1922. This appears to show the survey work that preceded construction. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

crossing the creek. A joint depot was constructed where the Holiday gas station is today. The railroad erected a freight house and installed a turntable for its gas cars. A shop facility and small yard was built on the west side of Nicollet at 60th Street, where LaJeune Steel is today.

The Dan Patch was competing with Milwaukee Road and Rock Island passenger trains for Minneapolis-Northfield and Faribault traffic, and with the Omaha Road for Mankato traffic. Requiring a transfer to streetcars to reach downtown was not attractive and it was slow. Here are the



Above and below: The Minnehaha Creek bridge as it appeared in the last years of streetcar service. The top view (Bob Schumacher photo) looks south and the bottom (Ray de Groote photo) view looks north.



comparative travel times.

Minneapolis-Northfield
Dan Patch/TCRT 125 min.
Rock Island via St. Paul 115 min.
Milwaukee Road via Mendota 103 min.

Minneapolis-Mankato
Dan Patch/TCRT 285 min.
Omaha Road via St. Paul 186 min.

The Dan Patch lacked freight connections into Minneapolis. To solve that problem and speed passenger service, they built a new line through the western suburbs to a new joint downtown station, shared with the Luce Line. It opened in 1915. Northfield-Minneapolis travel time dropped from 125 to 95 minutes. More importantly, all sorts of freight connections opened, ensuring the railroad's long term viability.

The Dan Patch passenger service to 54th and Nicollet became a railbus shuttle to the mainline trains at Auto Club Junction in southwest Bloomington. Ridership dropped off dramatically due to bus competition and private auto ownership. The last Dan Patch passenger train to 54th Street ran in 1922. The track was cut back to 69th Street, where it still ends today.

The last extensions

After the Dan Patch connection was severed in 1922, the City of Minneapolis replaced the steel bridge over Minnehaha creek with the multi-arched concrete span that remains in use today. As part of that project, TCRT double tracked the line to 54th Street. The 50th Street wye was replaced by a new wye at 48th Street. The 54th Street wye was moved from the west side of Nicollet to the east side, in the right of

way of what is now Diamond Lake Road.

The south city limits of Minneapolis expanded over the years. They were at 38th Street in 1883, then 54th Street in 1887. In 1927 they reached the present boundary of 62nd Street and a year later the Nicollet line was extended from 54th to 58th Street.

Right: From the photos we have of the 62nd Street extension, it appears that TCRT first rebuilt the track from Diamond Lake Road to 58th Street. This view looks north from the 58th wye.

Below: Looking south from near 58th Street. Kirt Blewett photo.





Above: A northbound car is leaving the temporary shoofly and is trying to return to the regular track just south of Diamond Lake Road, but that work car is fouling its path.

Below: Looking north from 59th Street at the construction of the permanent tracks from 58th to 62nd Streets. That's a rail grinder car. It appears that TCRT built the tracks and paved the track areas, as required by its city franchise.



Above: The extension from 58th to 62nd Street started by laying down temporary track so the work cars could access the site. That's a TCRT electric shovel at right.

Below: Viewed from 61st Street, the new line appears to be in service, even though the entire street is not finished. Note the sign for the Minneapolis Northfield & Southern shops.



After World War II development leaped Minnehaha Creek and quickly moved south into Richfield and even Bloomington. TCRT responded by extending the Nicollet line to a new loop at 62nd Street, the last track extension TCRT would build. In the process, they replaced the track between Diamond Lake Road and 58th Street.

Through routing and operations

Most TCRT streetcar lines were through-routed. This means they didn't terminate downtown. Instead, they were paired with another line on the opposite side of the city. The Nicollet line terminated downtown from 1890 to 1894. From 1894 to 1910 it was paired with the Washington Avenue N. line, then with Central Avenue NE until 1919. From 1919 to 1954 most trips were through routed with the 2nd Street NE line. From 1920 until 1948, certain trips were paired with the North West Terminal line that served Stinson Blvd. NE. After the Grand Avenue line was abandoned in 1952, the Nicollet cars were split between 2nd Street NE and Monroe NE.

Not surprisingly, the Nicollet line was run entirely out of online Nicollet Station. As of 1947, the morning rush hour required 54 streetcars, with 20 staying out all day. We don't have timetables, but that number of cars would have yielded a rush hour frequency of 2-3 minutes and a midday frequency of 5 minutes.

Nicollet was always one of the heaviest lines in the system. In 1941 and 1943, for which we have numbers, it was the 4th heaviest line in passengers per car mile and 5th in total passengers carried.



Extra service and non-revenue moves

Because of Nicollet Station, Nicollet Avenue saw numerous deadhead moves between 32nd Street and Lake Street. 4th Avenue cars turned east at Lake, while Bryant, Grand and Lake

Minnetonka cars turned west.

Until 1907, work motors towed freight cars to 31st Street Shops from the Milwaukee Road interchange at 29th Street. These included coal for the steam plant, sand, salt and streetcar

It's sort of a shock to see this early parking ramp at the corner of Marquette and 3rd Street. It was a harbinger of things to come. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



Above: A track closure is backing up traffic on Marquette between 4th and 5th Streets.

Right top and bottom: 6th and Marquette was the transfer point to the Glenwood-4th Avenue line. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

construction materials.

Nicollet Ball Park, located at 31st and Nicollet, was the destination and for scores of extra streetcars. Conveniently stored during the game at Nicollet Station, they loaded on Nicollet and fanned out across the city to carry the baseball fans home. Well



remembered are the holiday split double-headers between the Minneapolis Millers and the St. Paul Saints on Memorial Day and July 4th. After the first game, everyone would pile onto the streetcars and head for the other

ballpark, to watch the second game a couple of hours later.

Although we don't have documentation of it, it seems likely that extras ran for the start and end of classes at Washburn High School and Ramsey

Junior High. The schools also chartered streetcars for away sporting events and field trips.

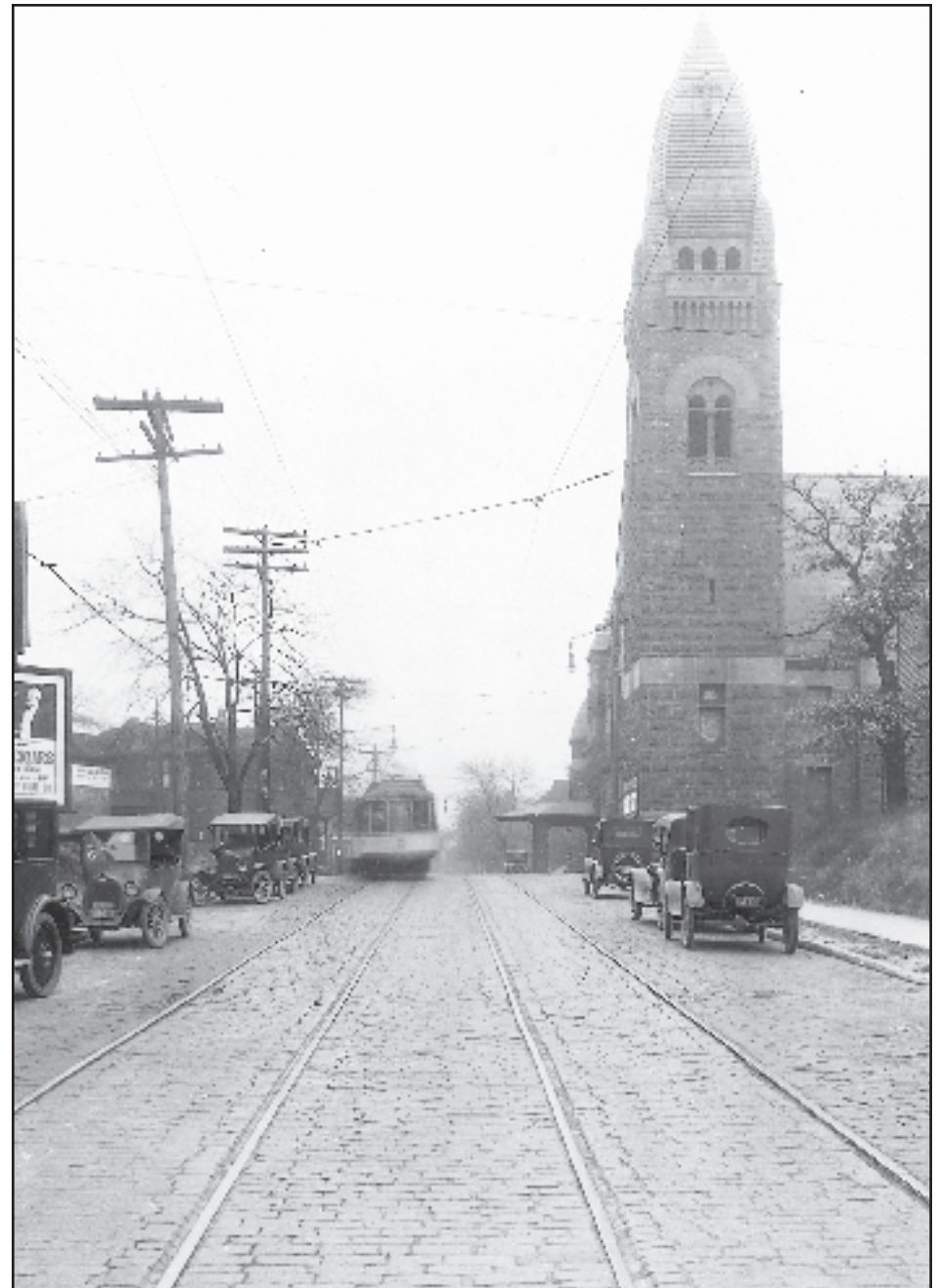
Other venues that probably needed extra cars were the Minneapolis Auditorium, located online at

8th and Marquette was the transfer point to the Chicago-Penn-Fremont line. Norton & Peel photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.





A southbound gate car on Marquette between 9th and 10th Streets.
Bob Mehlenbeck photo



A southbound car turns from Marquette onto Grant Street, passing Wesley Methodist Church, for the one-block transition to Nicollet Avenue. Charles Hibbard photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



Looking south
from 14th Street.
Minneapolis
Star-Tribune
photo,
Minnesota
Historical
Society collec-
tion.



Left: The corner of 26th Street and Nicollet. Hennepin County Library collection.

Below left: Nicollet at 19th Street.

Below: The Minneapolis Millers played at Nicollet Ball Park at 31st Street. Hennepin County Historical Society collection.





Above left: Nicollet Station in the 1920s.

Above right: At 36th Street.

Left: A snowy day at 42nd Street, passing what is now Martin Luther King Park. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



Above: Two views of the 51st Street hill.
Above left: Looking north from south of 50th Street. Note the Lustron prefab metal houses at right.

Above right: Looking north from near the Minnehaha Creek bridge.

Left: A downtown-bound PCC crosses the creek bridge.
John Stern photo, ERA collection.

Right: Parked on the Diamond Lake Road (54th Street) wye.
John Stern photo, ERA collection.





Above left: Backing into the Diamond Lake Road wye, even though the destination sign says 54th Street.

Above: Laying over on the 58th Street wye.

The 62nd Street loop at the Richfield City limits. John Stern photo, ERA collection.

Marquette and Grant Street, and the big downtown churches, including Central Lutheran, Wesley Methodist, St. Olaf's Catholic, Plymouth Congregational and Westminster Presbyterian.

The Grand Avenue line

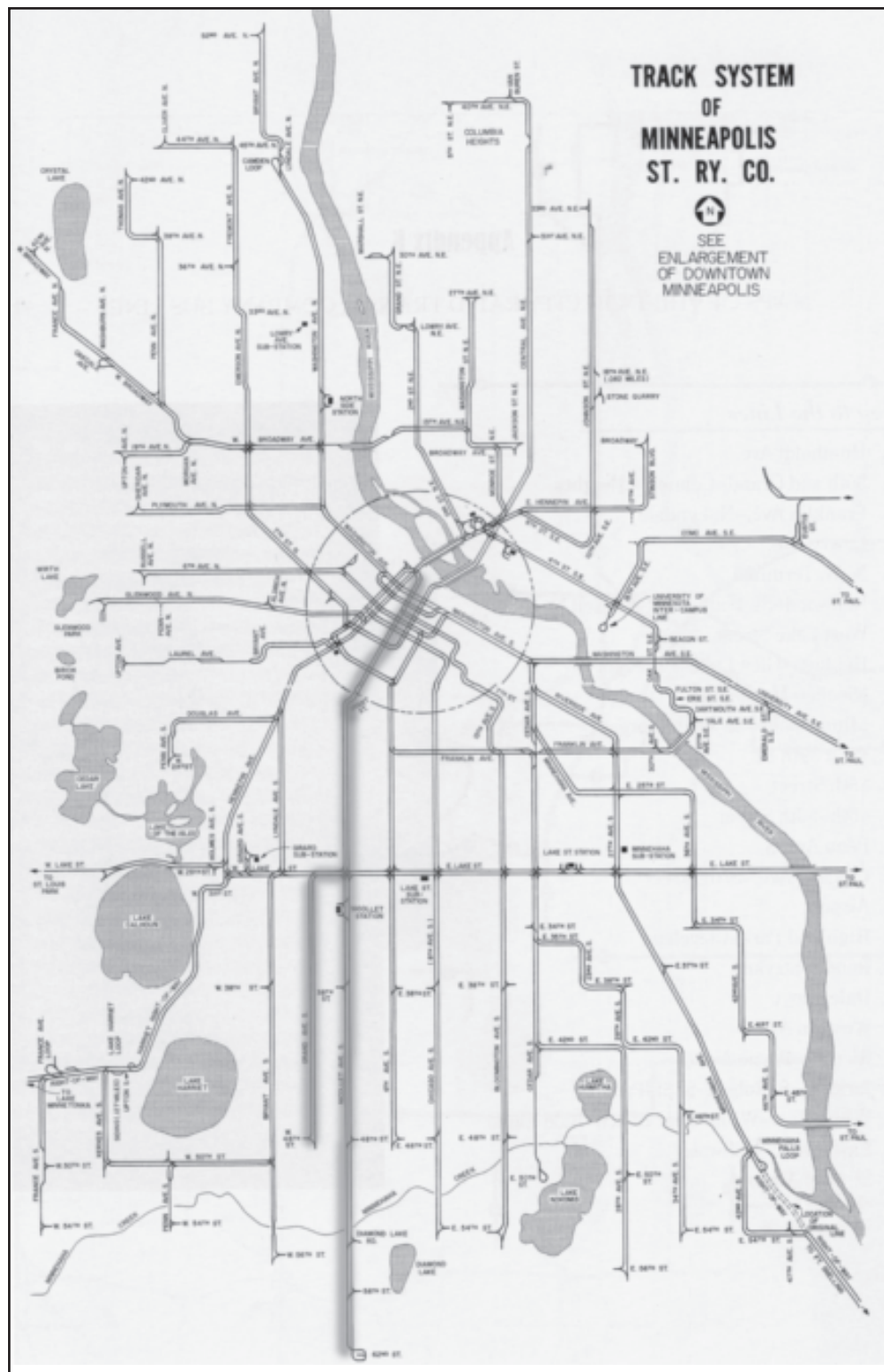
As development progressed south of Lake Street, it became clear to the city that a new line was needed to fill in the 10 block, .625 mile spacing between the Nicollet and Bryant Avenue lines. The solution was a line on Grand Avenue, 5 blocks west of Nicollet and 5 blocks east of Bryant. Grand Avenue cars used the Nicollet line through downtown and as far south as Lake Street. There they turned west on the Lake Street line tracks, then south on Grand.

The new line opened to 40th Street in late 1907. In 1923 it was extended almost to 48th Street. Whereas most other wyes were located in the middle of intersections, this one pulled off-street into a vacant lot. The old wye at 40th Street was removed in 1938.

Grand was through-routed with the Monroe Street NE line. Operation was split between Nicollet Station and East Side Station, and required 26 rush hour cars and 9 in the midday. It was less well patronized than Nicollet, with about a 10-minute midday frequency and 5 minutes during the rush hour.

Grand-Monroe was routinely assigned lightweight cars, an indication of its overall lighter patronage. There's no question, however, that the Grand cars helped reduce Nicollet line overloads where they shared the same tracks between Lake Street and downtown.

If Grand Avenue had a shortcoming, it was winter operations. Grand is one of the narrowest streets to host a car



line. Snow drifts made it even narrower in winter. It wasn't uncommon for parked cars to foul the tracks. I don't know if the city ever restricted winter parking back then, but it has been a common practice during the bus era, and that's with vehicles that can maneuver around parked cars.

1-man, PCCs, abandonment

The Great Depression of the 1930's combined with auto competition to cut ridership in half. TCRT responded by gradually eliminating conductors, starting with the lightest lines and the quietest time periods. here's how it progressed.

1932: Nicollet owl cars and all Grand Avenue service except rush hours.

1933: Nicollet evenings and Sundays.

1934: All Grand service.

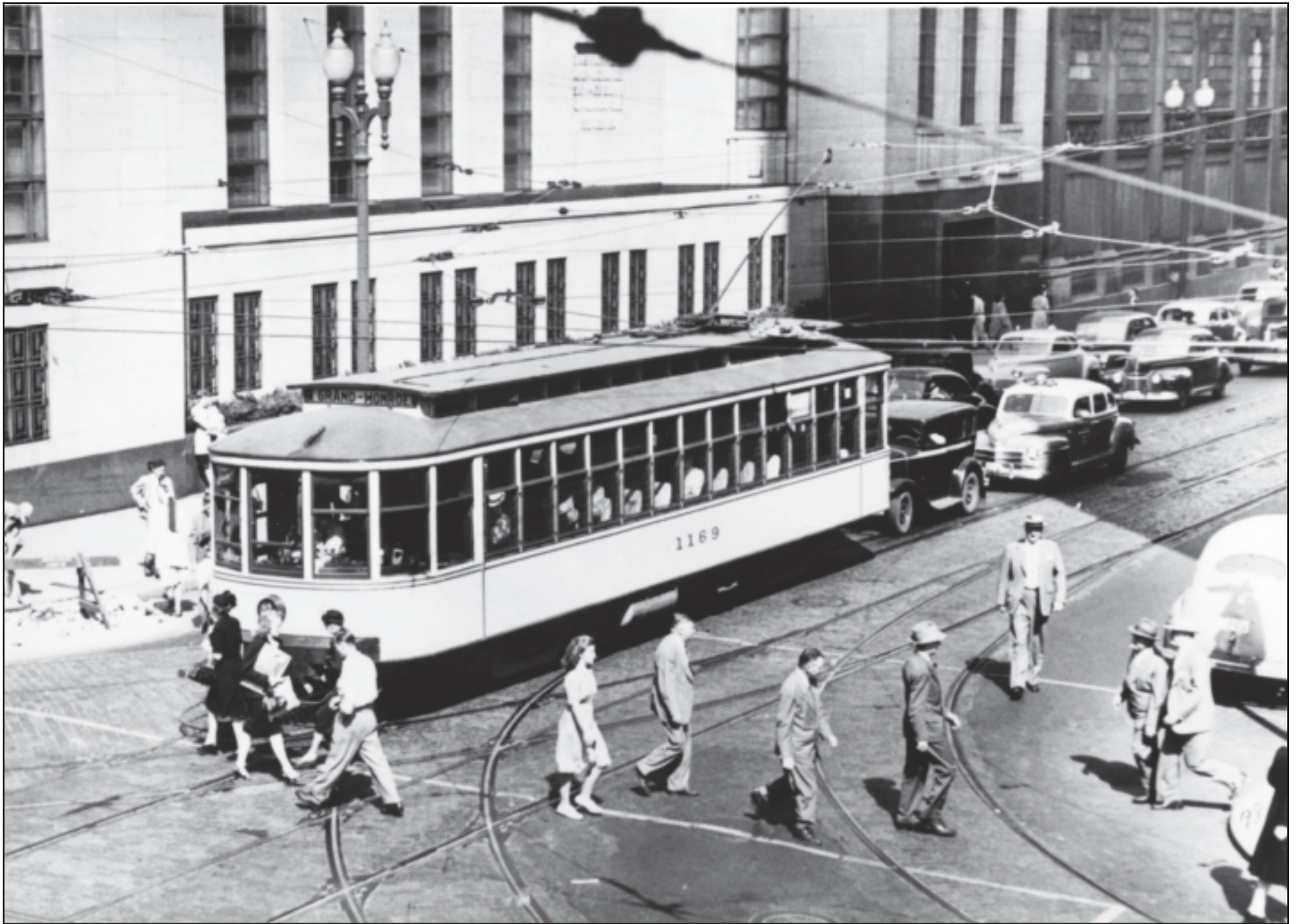
Ridership doubled during World War II, so Nicollet stayed with conductors on most runs all through the war. They were finally removed in 1949.

The first PCC cars were assigned to the Nicollet and Grand lines in July 1949. They were removed from service and sold to Newark, Mexico City and Shaker Heights (Cleveland) in 1953.

The Grand Avenue line was abandoned on October 18, 1952. The Nicollet line lasted until March 27, 1954.



A Grand-Monroe car on Marquette Avenue approaches 1st Street, where it will turn left to Hennepin and cross the Mississippi.



From 1920 to 1942 Grand-Monroe cars were routed through downtown on Marquette, 8th Street, 2nd Avenue S., 1st Street, then across the Mississippi on the 3rd Avenue bridge. In 1942 they switched to the Nicollet-2nd Street NE alignment via Marquette, 1st Street and Hennepin. This is 6th Street and Marquette. Hennepin County Library collection.

Above right: A southbound Grand-Monroe lightweight is headed west on Lake Street and is about to turn left onto Grand Avenue. Fred Zubrycki photo, Cliff Scholes collection.

This news photo was taken at 38th Street to illustrate the sorry state of repair of the road surface between the rails, TCRT's responsibility under the city franchise. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.





Left: A typical scene along Grand Avenue near 43rd Street. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Below left: The line ended midblock short of 48th Street at this wye.

Below right: This car has backed out of the wye into Grand Avenue and is ready for the next trip to downtown and northeast Minneapolis.





A Grand Avenue car has derailed on the switch from eastbound Lake Street to northbound Nicollet, attracting a large crowd along with a traffic cop and a TCRT service truck from nearby Nicollet Station. Contrast this to the current KMart wasteland. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



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